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Descartes's Dreams and Their Address for Philosophy

Michael Keevak

René Descartes's three youthful dreams of 10 November 1619 remained unknown until the publication of his first biography in 1691, Adrien Baillet's *Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes.*[1] Although Baillet claims that his dream-narrative is merely a translation of the Latin notes Descartes himself had made in the *Olympica*, a twelve-page manuscript which was never published and which has since been lost, Baillet of course must also accommodate the dreams into a biography; and we shall see that it is exactly the nature of the dreams' address that demands that they disappear into some kind of "story." Yet despite dozens of discussions from an exceedingly wide variety of critical perspectives, Descartes's dreams have always remained something of a problem—and not merely for the history of philosophy. Remarkably enough, however, none of these readings has attempted to examine what might really be the source of this interpretive difficulty, and this is the aim of the present essay.

In the first dream (I, 81-82; AT X, 181-82) Descartes imagines that he is trying to walk in the midst of a whirlwind and must turn to a college church for refuge. He passes a man whom he knows, but does not greet him; and another man calls out to him that "Monsieur N." has something to give him, which the dreamer imagines is a melon from a foreign land. But as he notices that those who are beginning to gather around him are standing perfectly upright while he remains bent over, even though the wind has calmed somewhat, he awakens with "a real pain" in his left side. After praying to God to preserve him from the dream's "evil effect" he

[1] Adrien Baillet, *La vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes* (2 vols.; Paris, 1691; facsimile reprint 2 vols.; New York, 1987), I, 80-86; volume and page numbers will be cited henceforth within parentheses in the text. Baillet's text is also reprinted in part in the standard edition of Descartes's works: Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (eds.), *Oeuvres de Descartes* (13 vols.; Paris, 1897-1913), X, 180-88. All references to this edition will be abbreviated AT, followed by volume and page numbers. The most accessible (but incomplete) English translation of the dream-narrative is Norman Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes: Descartes as Pioneer* (London, 1966), 33-39. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

meditates for some two hours before falling asleep again. In the second dream (I, 82; AT, X, 182) he hears a piercing noise which he takes for thunder, awakens immediately in a great fright, and sees sparks all around him. He had experienced this before, we are told; "but on this occasion he chose to have recourse to reasons taken from Philosophy"; and by alternately opening and closing his eyes and looking at the objects made visible around the room, he is able to calm himself and return to sleep. Finally, in the third dream (I, 82-85; AT, X, 182-86) he finds two books on a table, a dictionary, and a *Corpus poetarum*. Opening the latter and coming upon some words of Ausonius ("Which way of life should I follow?"), he is presented with a piece of verse beginning "Yes & No." The dreamer replies that the words are from Ausonius's *Idylls*. When he proceeds to leaf through the *Corpus*, however, he finds Ausonius's poems and some small engraved portraits but not the verses beginning "Yes & No"; and thereupon the man and the books vanish. At this point, and this fact seems especially noteworthy to Baillet, Descartes begins to interpret his dream while still asleep: "It is singularly remarkable that, doubting whether what he had just seen was dream or vision, not only did he decide while sleeping that it was a dream, but he also proceeded to interpret it before sleep left him" (I, 83; AT, X, 184). The dictionary signifies the sciences, the anthology represents the union between wisdom and philosophy, and the sparks, like the divine "Enthusiasm" of the poets, reside in the mind like sparks of fire in flint.

"Thereupon," says Baillet, Descartes "woke up" and "continued to interpret his dream along the same lines." The anthology now means Revelation and Enthusiasm, and the yes and no are those of Pythagoras. The engravings would be explained the following day by a visit from an Italian painter; the melon signifies "the charms of solitude"; and the wind, together with the pain in his side, are effects of the "evil Genie" working against the force that had directed him toward the church in the first place. Finally, the terror of the second dream, as Baillet puts it, is Descartes's "remorse of conscience"; and the thunder represents "the signal of the Spirit of Truth" (I, 84-85; AT, X, 184-86).

Now how do we understand these dreams, which are apparently so absurd? I want to emphasize that Descartes *wakes up* from them—and not once but three times. Although criticism commonly makes claims for a kind of awakening that the dreams might symbolize (that they mark the beginning of the development of the "method," in other words), I will argue that each time Descartes awakens it is to the same desire to reconstruct or recall the very biography that Baillet—or any other reader—will subsequently produce. That is, Descartes awakens in order to fit the dreams into his own biography, and the question is to what extent Descartes's self-analysis might also dictate to us. Is it possible to find in Descartes's own reader-responses the "source" for our own texts as well as for Baillet's?

Baillet, for example, apologizes for the dreams' "enthusiasm" immediately after he relates them, but he claims that he is merely following Descartes's own lead in the *Olympica*:

This last thought [regarding "the signal of the Spirit of Truth"] surely contained a bit of Enthusiasm, and it might incline us to believe that M. Descartes had been drinking the evening before he went to bed. . . . But he assures us that he had passed the evening and all the preceding day in complete sobriety, and that for three whole months he had drunk no wine. He adds that the Genie who had excited in him the enthusiasm which for several days he felt heating up his brain had predicted these dreams to him before his going to bed, and that the human mind had played no part in them. (I, 85; AT, X, 186)

But what is the meaning of this "enthusiasm," which, as Baillet reports, was even used in the manuscript's dramatic opening sentence: "On 10 November 1619, filled with Enthusiasm, I discovered the foundations of an admirable science" (I, 51; AT, X, 179)? And why would the dreamer himself feel such a need to excuse the very dreams that, as Baillet reports in the next paragraph, "he judged the most important of his life," and in honor of which he even vowed to undertake a pilgrimage (I, 85-86; AT X, 186-87)? By the time Baillet comes to write, there is obviously much more at stake here than just drunkenness, for there seems to be a very real danger that the philosopher who (at the very least) is given credit for the founding of modern rationalism—the most "awake" of all philosophers, in other words—might have begun his career with a series of enthusiastic and therefore "irrational" dreams, in which in fact "the human mind had played no part." In other words the dreams' enthusiasm is troubling exactly because it appears to come from outside philosophy, and it is just this possibility which comes to threaten not only the foundation of the "method" but even the signature "Descartes." That is, the very phrase "Descartes's dreams" seems to be an oxymoron, and this is the dreams' essential challenge which can be traced in the virtually uninterrupted stream of readings that have been produced since Descartes's own century.

Leibniz, who read the *Olympica* when Descartes's papers were entrusted to him in the 1670s, accuses Baillet of having misunderstood what Descartes meant by "the foundations of an admirable science." Leibniz openly calls Descartes an "Enthusiast," implying that he was a member of a secret and heretical society such as the Rosicrucians.[2] Baillet of course had gone to great lengths to defend Descartes and "Cartesianism" from just such a charge.[3] Note for example the way that the *Vie* broaches the

[2] Leibniz, "Remarques sur l'abrégé de la vie de Mons. des Cartes," C. J. Gerhardt (ed.), *Philosophische Schriften* (7 vols.; Berlin, 1875-1890), IV, 315.

[3] Cf. Leonard J. Wang, "A Controversial Biography: Baillet's *La vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes,*" *Romanische Forschungen*, 75 (1963), 316-31; and Gregor Sebba, "Adrien Baillet and the Genesis of His *Vie de M. Des-Cartes,*" Thomas M. Lennon, et al. (eds.), *Problems of Cartesianism* (Kingston, Ont., 1982), 9-60.

subject of the dreams themselves: Descartes "was fatigued to such an extent that a fire seized his brain, and he fell into a kind of enthusiasm which disposed his already dejected mind in such a way that it put him in a condition to receive the impressions of dreams and visions" (I, 81; AT, X, 181). In other words Descartes's enthusiasm is always given a place in a particular sequence of causes and effects that will supposedly help to "explain" it. One can see the same process at work in Baillet's version of the *Olympica*'s opening sentence, which is conveniently set off from the rest of his "translation" by means of italics: "He tells us that on 10 November 1619, having gone to bed *completely full of his enthusiasm*, and completely occupied with the thought *of having discovered on that day the foundations of an admirable science*, he had three consecutive dreams in a single night, which he imagined could only have come from above" (I, 81; AT, X, 181). Just as he claims that Descartes merely "fell" into a state of enthusiasm that only "disposed" him to "receive" the dreams, Baillet's reception of Descartes's text essentially attempts to account for the dreams by also making that enthusiasm specifically *precede* them in a way that may not even be substantiated by Descartes's Latin (that is, is the phrase "on that day" Baillet's invention?). Modern critics generally accept Baillet's version of this sequence unquestioningly. As Henri Gouhier (probably the single most influential authority on the dreams and their importance for the history of philosophy) has written, "the discovery of the 'foundations of an admirable science' is the work of the daytime, not the night."[4]

Thus we can see that Baillet feels a remarkable desire to excuse the dreams even as he is merely "transcribing" them, and that desire became even more evident when he produced an abridged, one-volume "popular" version of the *Vie* in the following year. As Baillet now says, Descartes "had three consecutive dreams, but extraordinary enough for him to imagine that they could have come to him from above."[5] Baillet's original emphasis on Descartes's conviction regarding the dreams' "source"—that their inspiration came from above (God) and not from below (Satan)[6]—is shifted in order to concentrate on the particularly powerful nature of the dreams themselves, which were "extraordinary enough" that they might well justify the dreamer's belief in their supernatural quality. At first there had been greater stress on the dreamer's *judgment* regarding the dreams, which is exactly what inspired so much derision in the seventeenth century in particular. Christian Huygens described the entire experience

[4] Henri Gouhier, *Essais sur Descartes* (Paris, 1937), 288.

[5] Baillet, *La vie de Mr. Des-Cartes, réduite en abrégé* (Paris, 1692), 45. References to the *Abrégé* will be cited henceforth within parentheses in the text.

[6] See Roberta Recht, " 'The Foundations of an Admirable Science': Descartes's Dreams of 10 November 1619," *Humanities in Society*, 4 (1981), 203. For a different view see Alice Browne, "Descartes's Dreams," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 40 (1977), 267.

as "a great weakness," and Pierre-Daniel Huet's 1693 parody of the episode claimed that the dreams were not "revelations from Heaven" at all but just "ordinary dreams" caused by tobacco or alcohol or melancholy.[7]

Despite Baillet's attempt to lay the blame on the power of the dreams themselves, in other words, he appears unable to give them a "cause" that is any more palatable. The most astonishing change in the *Abrégé* is that it actually omits the dream-narrative altogether in favor of the following "summary":

He had three consecutive dreams, but extraordinary enough for him to imagine that they could have come to him from above. He thought he could perceive through their shadows the signs of a path which God had marked out for him for following His will in his choice of life, and in pursuit of the truth which was the cause of his uneasiness. But the spiritual and divine air that he pretended to give to the explications he made of the dreams so powerfully bore the enthusiasm which he believed heated him up, that one might have been led to believe that his brain had been enfeebled, or that he had been drinking the evening before he went to bed. (*Abrégé*, 45-46)

Descartes's own defense against inebriation remains, but the "spiritual and divine air" of his interpretations is of course Baillet's new and somewhat more tidy description of the dreams' "enthusiasm." Further, the addition of the term "uneasiness" (*inquietudes*), which one psychoanalytic reader has fruitfully translated as "anxieties,"[8] may well be just another of Baillet's attempts to emphasize the overwhelming effect of the dreams' "extraordinary" quality; but at the same time the term naturally leads us to consider the manifestations of Baillet's own anxiety when given the chance to rework the text.

Let us not forget, however, that it is really Descartes who suppresses his dreams when he chooses not to publish the *Olympica*, and he will also silence them in a far more interesting way in the *Discourse on Method*, in which almost twenty years later he will describe the very same period of his youth without mentioning the dreams at all. The *Discourse* is Descartes's own *Abrégé*, in other words, and he will there omit the dreams and tell only the less "enthusiastic" story of the winter spent in the *poêle*. "I remained all day shut up alone in a stove-heated room," he writes, "where I had complete leisure to commune with my thoughts" (AT, VI,

[7] Christian Huygens, "De la vie de M. Descartes par Baillet," Victor Cousin (ed.), *Fragments philosophiques* (3 vols.; Brussels, 1840), II, 278; Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Nouveaux mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du cartesianisme* (1693), cited in AT X, 185 n. Cf. Auguste Comte's reference to the dreams as a "cerebral episode" and Malebranche's judgment that "the Life of M. Descartes by M. Baillet is bound to render him and his philosophy ridiculous." Both are cited in Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, tr. Mabelle L. Andison (New York, 1944), 15-16.

[8] Lewis S. Feuer, "The Dreams of Descartes," *The American Imago*, 20 (1963), 3-26. Apparently, however, Feuer does not realize that the term appears only in the *Abrégé*.

11). But if the dreams are locked up with him in the *poêle* and in those generalized "thoughts," the mention of which is the closest the *Discourse* ever actually comes to recounting the dreams themselves, are the dreams not also suppressed, because they are subsumed, by the more serious or "awake" reasoning of the *cogito*? What would it mean for the method and for the history of philosophy in general if in the beginning sections of the *Discourse* Descartes awakens from a set of dreams and in some larger sense also awakens to the method itself? Is the *cogito* an *awakening*—a fundamentally retrospective experience—in the sense that Descartes feels a need both to account for his dreams and to read back to them in such a way that they can be positioned in his own version of the *Vie*? Gouhier writes at length of the "retrospective schemes" of the *Olympica* and the *Discourse*, arguing that "Descartes devotes the second part of the *Discourse* . . . to explaining the meaning and the consequences of these memorable hours, as if, seventeen years later, he were once again grateful for the mercy of a second birth."[9] But might it also be said that Descartes anticipates or even dictates to Baillet, in the sense that Descartes recalls the *Olympica* in the *Discourse* just as Baillet himself will recall the *Discourse* when composing the *Vie*, or the *Vie* when writing the *Abrégé*? And how might the dreams demand a "retrospective" reading from us as well? For not only must we read across the four hundred years that divide us from the text, but we must also "read back" to the dreams from a position of having already "awakened" from them ourselves, and it is just such an awakening that Descartes's dreams appear to produce in us.

Of course the synthesis that our own readings produce is merely another version or abridgment of the *Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*, and thus every reader's desire, beginning with that of the dreamer himself, seems to be that the dreams become harmlessly "biographical." Any reading of the dreams, including Baillet's "transcription," will participate in what must have been Descartes's own experience while writing the *Discourse*, which is one of *waking up* and then—although perhaps unwillingly, incompletely, or silently—remembering what was dreamt. The address of a dream is that one wakes up and "forgets." As Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "in the unconscious, nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten";[10] and we shall see that criticism of the dreams displays precisely the same desire to "forget" the dreams even while (often silently) recalling them. My point, however, is that Descartes's own dream-narrative is already a remembrance that speaks

[9] Gouhier, *Les premières pensées de Descartes: contribution a l'histoire de l'Anti-Renaissance* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1979 [1958]), 31; for the "schemes" themselves see 42-47, 59-66.

[10] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, James Strachey, et al. (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 vols.; London, 1953-74), IV, 577. All subsequent references to the Standard Edition will be abbreviated SE, followed by volume and page numbers.

from beyond the dreams—and because (not in spite of) the fact that one has "awakened." One does not merely awaken "from" the dreams because the dreams awaken *us*. Let us postulate, then, that in the first place both Descartes and Baillet want us to believe that since the dreams "come from above," one must not reproach the dreamer for being overcome by a spell of "enthusiasm," and secondly, that not only are Descartes's dreams (auto)biographical, but they also elicit a strange desire to forget that they are. And yet if the dreams are only "forgotten," what does it really mean to be awake?

But let us pause to ask whether Baillet's account of the dreams is even "faithful" to the text of the *Olympica*. Adam and Tannery claim that the *Vie* "contains such particular circumstances and such singular details that [Baillet] does not seem to have invented anything," and that "one can therefore believe that we possess . . . at least the essentials of Descartes's treatise" (AT, X, 175). Yet will we not wonder on the contrary just how much more than "the essentials" Baillet's defense might include? Although some such as Huygens have found fault with him for not having suppressed Descartes's dream-narrative immediately (instead of waiting until the *Abrégé*),[11] readers do not generally question the authenticity of the *Vie* in the sense that, however Baillet may "translate" what he reads in the manuscript, Descartes *did* in fact have three dreams. Readers assume in other words some core of truth to the dreams—or what Gouhier repeatedly calls "the dream really dreamt."

Although it is certainly true that any reader will misrepresent and misunderstand the dreams merely because they are being reconstructed (that is, remembered) from an "original," Gouhier so unconditionally accepts the text of the *Vie* that he actually deemphasizes the interpretations that Descartes himself is said to have made while "asleep": the only interpretation that can be taken seriously begins after the dreamer wakes up, and on this view not only is the third dream the most "real," but it is the only one that "deserves to attract our attention." Furthermore, since the first two dreams probably "return to his memory only at the moment when he has already interpreted the third one," the third dream "accords the privilege of being the nearest to the dream really dreamt"; and "the two others are reconstructions sufficiently remote from his wakeful consciousness and, indeed, arranged according to a 'key' that renders his memory a bit too intelligent." In brief "the order of the narrative" is the very opposite of "the real order, which is that of recollection"; or as one of Gouhier's reviewers has put it, "it is above all the posterior interpretation which counts."[12]

[11] Huygens, "De la vie de M. Descartes," II, 277.

[12] Gouhier, *La Pensée religieuse de Descartes* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1972 [1924]), 311-12; *Premières pensées*, 37; Bernard Rochot, "Sur quelques-unes des 'premières pensées' de Descartes," *Revue de synthèse*, 79 (1958), 315.

Gouhier's view of Descartes's narrative is itself a fascinating drama of waking up and "forgetting," for the desire to reconstruct "the dream really dreamt" seems in fact to threaten the erasure not only of the first two dreams but even the intervals that follow.[13] The dreams, writes Gouhier, are "three acts of the same revelation"[14] (Freud too says that "the content of all dreams that occur during the same night forms part of the same whole" [SE, IV, 333]), but readers such as Richard Kennington even try to divide the dreamer's own interpretations into three corresponding "kinds": "a waking reflection or interpretation after each dream, a sleeping interpretation preceding the waking one of the third dream, and a reinterpretation of the first two dreams which augments and modifies preceding ones." This division might seem unproblematic enough, and it is of course the way that Baillet had organized the dream-material as well, but Kennington also introduces a category called "the non-dreaming but sleeping Descartes" who "doubts . . . whether he had seen 'dream' or 'vision.' " This too seems to recall Baillet's description of the interpretations that the dreamer began "after" the dream but "before sleep left him," but one wonders why it seems so important that Descartes specifically be sleeping but *not* dreaming, why even the possibility of a "dreaming interpretation" seems to be systematically avoided. Could Descartes even have doubted—which for Kennington is a thoroughly "rational" act—while merely "dreaming"?

Like Baillet, Kennington seems distinctly uncomfortable about the possibility that Descartes might have begun to interpret his dreams before actually "waking up," and it is in this light that we must also understand the kind of assumptions that lie behind his conclusion:

> [The dreams] compel us to consider the possibility that the work's every feature, dream as well as interpretation, is consciously intended. The *Olympica* would then be a deliberate, "poetic" construction, whose meaning is disclosed only to careful study—even if it was occasioned by actual dreams.

Again the "rational" and "awake" Descartes is being given precedence, but why would the dreams no longer be such a problem merely because they were "consciously intended," "deliberate," or "poetic"? Clearly one cannot "forget" the dreams merely by translating them into this kind of "fiction."[15]

[13] Baillet tells us that "an interval of almost two hours" separates the first two dreams (I, 82; AT X, 182). On this point see Alice Browne, "Descartes's Dreams," 261; and Charles D. Minahen, " 'Olympian Vertigo': Deconstructing Descartes's Reconstruction of the 'Trois Songes,' " *Symposium*, 41 (1987), 137 n. 7.

[14] Gouhier, *Pensée religieuse*, 312.

[15] Richard Kennington, "Descartes' 'Olympica,' " *Social Research*, 28 (1961), 175, 185, 189. At least three other readers cannot account for the fact that Descartes begins to interpret the dreams before "waking up," and each of these readers leaves off interpreting Baillet's text at exactly this point in the narrative: Georges Poulet, "The Dream of

Indeed the dreams have never ceased to be a problem. In the texts of Gouhier they bring about the danger of encroachment from wholly "non-philosophical" domains such as Rosicrucianism and psychoanalysis. According to Gouhier, however, Descartes's own "retrospective" viewpoint actually wards off such troubling interpretations, for the dreamer supposedly does not consider or even remember the first two dreams until after the third one; and since he does not perceive the "supernatural" or "inspired" quality of the dreams until after their so-called waking interpretations have commenced, the dreams' true character—their divine origin—"is concluded and not felt." Once more the emphasis is on Descartes the "rationalist," and just as the visit from the painter serves for the dreamer as "a proof of the dream's supernatural character," the whole experience is really only "a dream that receives a supernatural interpretation because such an application succeeds." According to Baillet, Descartes bases his interpretation of the first two dreams only on the relative reassurance provided by the third one, but Gouhier actually asks us to *repeat* this gesture by beginning to read the dreams with their endpoint as well: "And so it seems appropriate," he writes, "when one recounts this episode to begin with the last dream."[16] It is almost as if Gouhier wanted us to wake up and read "along the same lines" as the dreamer himself. Yet what would be "the same" in this case, and what criteria would we possess for judging whether or not our own rationalizations were able to "succeed"? What might Gouhier really be asking us to *forget* about the dreams?

In only five years, however, Gouhier's hypotheses will be unavoidably confronted by an intervention that will suddenly and permanently alter the nature of the whole debate—because it will come from Sigmund Freud. Freud became involved when a philosopher named Maxime Leroy wrote to him for a "consultation," and his response, which Leroy translated into French, first appeared in 1929. The letter was also printed in German editions of Freud's complete works and subsequently translated into English for the Standard Edition.[17] It is rather remarkable, however, that over the succeeding fifty years Gouhier never really takes psychoanalysis into account. Although he includes footnotes that make passing reference to Freud when citing Leroy (who wrote "with the consultation of

Descartes," *Studies in Human Time*, tr. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore, 1956), 69; Heinrich Quiring, "Der Traum des Descartes: Eine Verschlüsselung seiner Kosmologie, seiner Methodik und der Grundlage seiner Philosophie," *Kant-Studien*, 46 (1954/1955), 152; and Bernd Jager, "The Three Dreams of Descartes: A Phenomenological Exploration," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, 8 (1968), 212. For an even more elaborate "fictional" description of the dreams see Marcel de Corte, "La Dialectique poétique de Descartes," *Archives de Philosophie*, 13 (1937), 101-61.

[16] Gouhier, *Pensée religieuse*, 312 (emphasis removed).

[17] Maxime Leroy, *Descartes: le philosophe au masque* (2 vols.; Paris, 1929), I, 88-90; Freud, *Gesammelte Schriften* (12 vols.; Leipzig, 1924-34), XII, 403-5; *Gesammelte Werke* (18 vols.; London, 1940-68), XIV, 558-60; and SE, XXI, 199-204.

Professor S. Freud"), what Gouhier calls the dreams' "reconstitution" seems to merit the citation only of Marcel Foucault's *Le Rêve* (1906!), and even in 1979 we find only one reference to an essay that had appeared in the *Revue française de psychanalyse*—even though many other (and far better) examples might have been suggested.[18] Is Freud's position really so marginal? Further, both Leroy's and Gouhier's use of the term "consultation," despite its apparent terminological propriety, is also telling because it demonstrates that Freud is really unable to judge the dreams' true "philosophical" import; although one might wish to "consult" him in the hope of gaining some new insight, it is still the knowledge of an outsider that must be *applied*. Philosophy is hostile to psychoanalysis because, among other things, a psychoanalytic interpretation of Descartes (philosopher *par excellence*) might appear both anachronistic and inappropriate[19]; and it seems as if dreams and Descartes, like philosophy and psychoanalysis themselves, will remain forever irreconcilable.

Let us for the moment, however, put aside the specifics of Freud's participation in order to address Gouhier's reaction to the so-called "Rosicrucian question," which, because it is already very much at issue in Baillet's description of Descartes's enthusiasm, is much less easy for Gouhier to disregard. "Philosophical" or not, Rosicrucianism seems undeniably "present" in the dream-narrative and therefore cannot, like psychoanalysis, be discounted merely because it appears inapplicable. Moreover, in the same period Descartes composed two other works (also lost) that might have been more explicit about his interest in the Society: the *Studium bonae mentis*, to which Baillet frequently refers when discussing the Rosicrucians, and the *Thesaurus mathematicus*, whose full title (cited in the *Cogitationes privatae* [AT, X, 214]) indicates that it had actually been dedicated to the Brotherhood. There is also a striking correspondence between Descartes's cachet (the initials R.C.) and the intertwined R and C used by the Rosicrucians; although according to Adam this fact is merely coincidental (AT, XII, 48), Baillet seems unwilling or unable to acquit Descartes so easily. He must find a "place" for Rosicrucianism just as he must accommodate the dreams themselves.

In fact when he begins a new chapter on the Brotherhood (immediately following the dream-narrative), it is clear that he wants the dreams not

[18] For the Freud citations see Gouhier, *Essais*, 287; "Descartes a-t-il rêvé?" *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 10 (1956), 203 n. 1; and *Premières pensées*, 33 n. 80. Foucault is cited in *Premières pensées*, 33 n. 81, and the psychoanalytic article—Maurice Bénassy, "Deux poètes, un philosophe: rêves et rêveries," *Revue Française de psychanalyse*, 40 (1976), 65-91—is cited at 163.

[19] See, for instance, Cornelia Serrurier, *Descartes, l'homme et le penseur* (Paris, 1951), 19; and Rochot, "Premières pensées," 316 n. 14. Conversely, Freud's view of philosophy is hardly more amicable: "The professional philosophers have become accustomed to polishing off the problems of dream-life (which they treat as a mere appendix to conscious states) in a few sentences—and usually in the same ones" (SE, IV, xxv).

only to precede Descartes's Rosicrucian interest but even to "cause" it—just as a similar relationship had already been fashioned between the philosopher's enthusiasm and the dreams that "follow." "The solitude of M. Descartes," he writes, "did not at all lead to the exclusion of amateurs from his chamber who were able to discuss the sciences and what was new in literature," and "it was in conversation with these men that he heard of a Brotherhood of Savants established in Germany some time ago under the name of the Brothers of the Red-Cross" (I, 87; AT, X, 193). Precisely unlike Gouhier's reaction both to Rosicrucian speculations and to psychoanalytic readings, in other words, Baillet's Descartes is interested in members of the Brotherhood only because he is not anxious immediately to *exclude* them; and Baillet must go to some length to assure his readers that Descartes was in fact unable to discover a single *confrère* (not for nothing were they known as "The Invisibles"):

> Descartes was not aware of those rules which prescribed that they never appear before anyone as they really were, that they should go in public dressed like other men, and that they must never reveal themselves either in their speech or in any other manner of living. One should thus not be surprised if all his curiosity and all his efforts to learn something about the matter should have proven useless. It was impossible for him to discover a single man who would declare himself part of this Brotherhood, or who could even be suspected of being so. He was almost to the point of placing the society at the level of chimeras.[20] (I, 90; AT, X, 196)

Notice the way that Baillet wants to find a precise explanatory relationship between Descartes's youth, his dreams, and the chimerical; and when we see that the same is true of Leibniz's commentary,[21] it is evident that the conjunction of these three elements is meant to provide a kind of youthful "excuse" both for Descartes's enthusiastic interpretations and for the fact that he might have been interested in the Brotherhood in the first place. By the time he comes to publish the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* (the "seriousness" of which, unlike the *Olympica*, is rarely disputed), the "grown up" and "awake" Descartes can merely shake off those chimerical dreams and lay behind him forever the embarrassingly naive attractions that they appear inevitably to suggest.

Thus Rosicrucianism fits into a scheme just as the dreams do, and although the credibility of Descartes's method itself may appear to hinge on the Rosicrucian question, that question only forces us once again to reconsider the philosopher's *biography*. Looked at in this way, it is apparent that the curiosity but ultimate disappointment that many have felt in the insights of a psychoanalytic reading parallels Descartes's own search

[20] Baillet draws some of his material from a contemporary apology by Nicolas-Joseph Poisson, *Commentaire ou remarques sur la méthode de René Descartes* (Vendôme, 1670), 30-32, also quoted in AT X, 197 n.

[21] Leibniz, "Remarques sur l'abrégé," IV, 315.

for knowledge from the Rosicrucians. To repeat Baillet, both efforts seem ultimately "useless," and the situation remained essentially unchanged until Paul Arnold's pioneering research in the 1950s. Specifically, according to Arnold, the Brotherhood did not even exist in 1620, even though there may have been a great amount of "Rosicrucian" literature circulating at the time, the most widely known example being Johann Valentin Andreae's *Chemische Hochzeit*.[22] The prevalence of such works is a fact that Baillet had emphasized as well:

> [Descartes] was hindered by the stir created by the great number of apologetic writings on behalf of these Rosicrucians, both in Latin and in German, which had been published up until that time and which still continued to multiply. He did not think he could rely upon all these writings, either because his inclination led him to take these new Savants as imposters, or because he had given up books and wanted to accustom himself to judging everything only according to the testimony of his eyes and ears and according to his own experience. This is why he had no difficulty in saying some years later that he knew nothing about the Rosicrucians, and he was also surprised to learn from his friends in Paris, when he returned to that city in 1623, that his travels in Germany had merited him the reputation of being part of the Brotherhood of Rosicrucians. (I, 90-91; AT, X, 196-97)

Thus for Baillet, as for Arnold, Descartes's Rosicrucianism may really be as legendary as the Brotherhood itself and his interest in them nothing but a *rumor*; as Gouhier has written, "Descartes's affiliation with the Brotherhood does not relate to the history of the philosopher but to the history of his history."[23] Whether or not Descartes had any genuine interest in cabalistic philosophy, alchemy, and so on, or whether he merely moved among such circles for a time, he could hardly have belonged to a sect that was merely a *chimère*; and thus Rosicrucianism *itself* is now anachronistic and must be put in quotation marks just as the dreams are in Arnold's title—"The 'dream' of Descartes." The Rosicrucian question is no longer one of initiation so much as literary influence, and (so Arnold) Descartes's dreams are merely "based on" a Rosicrucian poem such as Andreae's and thus "fabricated . . . on the model or the theme of known parables."[24] Yet how is such a "forgery" different from the kind of fictionalization suggested by readers such as Kennington?

[22] Paul Arnold, "Le 'songe' de Descartes," *Cahiers du Sud*, 35 (1952), 274. For a different view from a twentieth-century Rosicrucian, see Gabriel Persigout, "L'illumination de René Descartes rosi-crucien: contribution à l'étude de l'imagination créatrice," *Trauvaux du IXe Congrès International de Philosophie: Congrès Descartes* (12 vols.; Paris, 1937), II, 123-30.

[23] Gouhier, *Premières pensées*, 129.

[24] Arnold, "Le 'songe' de Descartes," 290. On possible literary analogues for the dreams see Jean-Marie Wagner, "Esquisse du cadre divinatoire des songes de Descartes," *Baroque*, 6 (1973), 81-95; Browne, "Descartes's Dreams," 267-71; and Recht, "Foundations," 205-6.

Gouhier responds by admitting that he feels forced to accommodate Arnold's position, but he concedes only in part: the dreams' similarity to Rosicrucian writings merely proves that "Descartes recognized in the itinerary of the perfect Rosicrucian a certain analogy with his own spiritual history." The dreams may have been "forged" but their Rosicrucian analog is still only "an ornamental influence," and thus the dream-narrative is at bottom still "real":

Is the narrative of the *Olympica* a fable? . . . On the night of 10–11 November 1619 Descartes had at least one dream, and it will be entirely contained in the finale of the third dream according to the *Olympica*: Descartes woke up in the act of interpreting the verse of Ausonius: "Which way of life should I follow?"

Therefore not everything is fictional in this narrative. It is possible that the ensemble coordinated out of the three dreams will be, according to the hypothesis of Paul Arnold, a literary process of explanation, but one which starts out from a dream really dreamt. . . . [I]f there is a fable, it has been conceived in view of something which, in itself, is not a fable.[25]

This is a rather curious position, however, for even though the dreams may be "a fable" (and as Gouhier surely recognizes, Descartes himself had described the *Discourse* in similar terms [AT, VI, 4]), the *Olympica* also contains some "dream really dreamt" which continues to remain unassimilable both to philosophy and to "Descartes." In his culminating volume on Descartes's early writings, in a section now called "the 'dreams' of Descartes," Gouhier repeats and even expands his emphasis on the dreams' "retrospective" nature, but the first two dreams are now called "the two nightmares." This distinction is actually drawn from Baillet (I, 82; AT, X, 182), but it also provides Gouhier with yet another means to privilege what he calls the "conscious interpretation" of the third dream:

Everything else in the narrative may be a fable [i.e., other than the following entry in the *Cogitationes privatae*: "A dream, Nov. 1619, in which, poem 7 beginning: Which way of life should I follow? . . . Ausonius" (AT, X, 216)], but this does not prevent a fragment of a true dream from being found at the center—at the moment when everything justifiably comes to a head, and when, in fact, everything passes into the unfolding of the pseudo-dreams. . . . Descartes surely dreamt that he read "Which way of life should I follow?" with the feeling that the question concerned him.[26]

Yet the difficulty is still in distinguishing a "pseudo-dream" from a "true" one. Although Gouhier seems to believe that he can pin down what Descartes "surely dreamt," it is just as clear that Arnold's thesis, perhaps like the Rosicrucian question itself, will not simply disappear; because "the 'dreams' of Descartes" remain not only intangible, but also counterfeit (in

[25] Gouhier, "Descartes a-t-il rêve?" 205-6, 206-8.

[26] Gouhier, *Premières pensées*, 35, 41; *Pensée religieuse*, 312.

quotation marks) and duplicitous (plural), they seem to have become "nightmares" for Gouhier as well.

Subsequently, however, Arnold also concedes to Gouhier, and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between them at all. "There is indeed a core of genuine dreams," writes Arnold,

> that in waking up Descartes . . . reconstructed and probably embellished and altered. But this does nothing to modify my hypothesis concerning the dreams' origin, which is at once both a matter of dreams really dreamt and of voluntary additions. . . . [I]t is no longer a matter . . . of a voluntary and conscious copying on the part of Descartes, but a succession of dreams directly inspired, charged with the events of the *Chemische Hochzeit* but deformed, reconstructed by the dreamer in a new and personalized framework.

The fact that there is still some "core of genuine dreams" means that the dreams are, as Arnold continues, "just as much properly dreamt, and therefore subconscious and involuntary, as they are reconstructed and voluntary"; but there seems to be no more hope than in Gouhier of distinguishing the "voluntary additions" from the "dreams really dreamt," and we once again end up in a position where the dreams are somehow dreamt as well as falsified.[27] Arnold is absolutely correct when he writes that the dreams are "deformed" because they are "reconstructed"; but instead of beginning to apply this insight to the reader as well as to the dreamer, he takes another step backward ten years later when he concedes even further to the authority of Gouhier: "nothing permits us to think," he writes, "that . . . Descartes had totally adhered to a doctrine regarding which he could not, according to Baillet, collect all the information he desired."[28] Arnold has thus actually reverted to Baillet's position, that Descartes's Rosicrucian efforts simply "fail." Like Descartes himself, in other words, Arnold seems to have gathered up as much information as possible but to no avail, and it is tempting to claim that the debate has gradually "awakened" him as well. Yet he has certainly not awakened from the dreams in the sense that he has gradually learned to recognize the "truth" about the Rosicrucians, for on the contrary he has only come to see that the dreams' "reality" is not in fact identical to "the dream really dreamt." He has seen that the only thing "real" about the dreams is their essential *un*accountability, and in this sense he has awakened not from the dreams but *to* them. His reading has provided no better "solution"; and because he has merely remembered the dreams all over again, which is exactly their address, the Rosicrucian question has uncovered an inability to reconcile not only Descartes with the Brother-

[27] Arnold, "Descartes et les Rose-Croix," *Mercure de France*, 340 (October, 1960), 272, 276, 284.

[28] Arnold, *La Rose-Croix et ses rapports avec la Franc-Maçonnerie: essai de synthèse historique* (Paris, 1970), 163.

hood (that is, one R.C. with another) but also Descartes's "rationalism"—which is philosophy itself—with his (or any) dreams.

Furthermore, most readers simply assume that they themselves are fully awake when interpreting the thoughts of the dreamer, and this is most clearly exemplified in essays on the dreams by analytic philosophers, who usually begin by assuming distinctions between sleep and wakefulness rather than trying to find out precisely what these categories themselves might already entail.[29] Descartes himself relies on the comfort of "reasons taken from Philosophy," which enable him to return to sleep following the second dream, but will our own appeals to philosophy's supposed purity or wakefulness necessarily put us (back) to sleep as well? We have begun to see that the desire to distinguish what is "really dreamt" from what is forged or "fictionalized" is only a repetition of the desire that appears in Descartes's own narrative. Yet why is "the dream really dreamt" even the question? Has the Rosicrucian debate not made it apparent that the effect of the dream(s) cannot be counteracted or neutralized simply by appealing to what might have been "really dreamt"? Psychoanalysis has taught us that a dream "really dreamt" is in fact not the (biographical) reality that would enable us to understand the dream, because the phrase "dream really dreamt" is exactly like "Descartes's dream" insofar as it is inherently contradictory: a dream is the very *opposite* of what is "really dreamt," for one confronts what is real only insofar as reality is what a dream has always missed, always "forgotten." The real is exactly what a dream covers over, and thus the dreams' effect, not what was "really dreamt," is what is real in them.

But if we pause to ask whether psychoanalytic readers of the dreams have fared any better, it will be clear that they only participate in the same patterns because, despite the fact that they may be more interested in the psychological effect of the dreams upon the dreamer himself, such readers will also judge Descartes's experiences based on their biographical importance. Leroy's request, for example, really stems from a desire to glean a particular kind of information—regarding Descartes's sexuality—that he cannot obtain merely from "philosophy": Freud had suggested in passing that the melon in the first dream "might stand for a sexual picture which occupied the lonely young man's imagination" (SE, XXI, 204); and Leroy, who takes this to mean that Descartes "went through a crisis of conscience," senses that a great deal of information must also be hidden in the "extremely intellectualized confession of the *Discourse*." But when Leroy begins to meditate on the importance of Descartes's early friendship with Isaac Beeckman, it becomes rather transparent that their relationship's sudden and painful end is the real "crisis of conscience" and the

[29] Willis Doney (ed.), *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, 1967), 373-75, conveniently lists thirty-six such essays on Descartes and dreaming—and only through 1967.

"delicate point" that Leroy had in mind when he decided to "consult" Freud in the first place.[30] Similarly, psychoanalysts customarily invert Descartes's attraction to the Rosicrucians in order to investigate the traditional science, intellectual dependence or paternal authority that he might have been running from[31]; and Stephen Schönberger, one of the dreams' earliest psychoanalytic readers, places much stock in the fact that Descartes suffered from the loss of his mother when he was only two years old. That is, although the particulars that psychoanalysis chooses to emphasize, such as Schönberger's comment that the first dream "centers round masturbation and homosexuality," may appear rather different from the details that Gouhier finds the most important, Schönberger has every bit as much interest in the third dream and in the "discoveries" of the preceding day as Gouhier himself, and it is clear that Descartes's "youth" has lost none of its centrality.[32]

But let us look more closely at what Freud himself has said. He begins with an apology:

> On considering your letter asking me to examine some dreams of Descartes, my first feeling was an impression of dismay, since working on dreams without being able to obtain from the dreamer himself any indications on the relations which might link them to one another or attach them to the external world . . . gives, as a rule, only a meager result. In the event my task turned out to be easier than I had anticipated; nevertheless, the fruit of my investigations will no doubt seem to you much less important than you had a right to expect. (SE, XXI, 203)

Despite a certain amount of recent speculation, the source of Freud's "dismay" remains unclear; and perhaps his apparent hesitancy to interpret the dreams is due to a certain uncomfortableness he feels with the "answer" that Leroy, in the name of philosophy, is demanding from him. Yet since on other occasions Freud had endeavored to psychoanalyze historical figures such as Leonardo, is Freud's letter to Leroy, as one psychoanalyst has written, merely a case of "politeness toward Leroy, indifference toward Descartes"?[33] "Our philosopher's dreams are what are known as 'dreams from above,' " Freud continues:

> That is to say, they are formulations of ideas which could have been created just as well in a waking state as during the state of sleep, and which have derived their content only in certain parts from mental states at a comparatively deep

[30] Leroy, *Descartes*, I, 91, 96. On what might be "hidden" in the *Discourse* cf. W. T. Jones, "*Somnio ergo sum*: Descartes's Three Dreams," *Philosophy and Literature*, 4 (1980), 145-62.

[31] See Feuer, "Dreams of Descartes," 13, 19.

[32] Stephen Schönberger, "A Dream of Descartes: Reflections on the Unconscious Determinants of the Sciences," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 20 (1939), 43, 57.

[33] Bénassy, "Deux poètes," 75.

level. That is why these dreams offer for the most part a content which has an abstract, poetic, or symbolic form. (SE XXI, 203)

Freud understands that the dreams demand that they be characterized as "abstract, poetic, or symbolic" by the dreamer as well as by subsequent interpreters; but he obviously does not mean the same kind of "poetic" "reinterpretation" that will later be suggested by Kennington, because Freud's interest in the dreams is very different from many readers' curiosity about—again, to recall Kennington—what is "consciously intended." It is remarkable that no reading of the dreams before Françoise Meltzer's 1988 essay comments on what would appear to be an absolutely obvious fact, that in Baillet we are also told that the dreams had "come from above."

As Meltzer rightly points out, however, Freud's concept of *Träume von oben* is quite different, for Descartes's dreams come "from above" not in the sense that they are divinely inspired but because they are so closely related to his conscious, waking thought; "from above" in Freud is really from *below*—not from without (heaven) but from "within."[34] Of course Descartes himself understands that the dreams are closely related to his "wakeful" preoccupations, but Freud's attribution of the dreams' "cause" is not at all the same:

The analysis of dreams of this kind usually leads us to the following position: we cannot understand the dream, but the dreamer—or the patient—can translate it immediately and without difficulty, given that the content of the dream is very close to his conscious thoughts. There then remains certain parts of the dream about which the dreamer does not know what to say: and these are precisely the parts which belong to the unconscious and which are in many respects the most interesting.

In the most favorable cases we explain this unconscious part with the help of the ideas which the dreamer has added to it.

This way of judging "dreams from above"—and this term must be understood in a psychological, not in a mystical [or "enthusiastic"?] sense—is the one to be followed in the case of Descartes's dreams. (SE, XXI, 203)

Indeed Freud does appear hesitant to offer an interpretation, and he seems less concerned with the dreams' psychological or biographical "meaning" than with the fact that one must allow Descartes to interpret them himself—as if the dreams must be allowed to remain Descartes's and therefore forever inaccessible. But what are the implications of this refusal? What is the dreams' address for Freud? "The philosopher interprets them himself," he goes on, "and, in accordance with the rules for the interpretation of dreams, we must accept his explanation, but it should be added that we have no path open to us which will take us any further" (SE, XXI,

[34] Françoise Meltzer, "Descartes' Dreams and Freud's Failure, or The Politics of Originality," Meltzer (ed.), *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago, 1988), 94.

204). Is it Descartes's own reading that leads Freud to begin with the remark that the dreams were easier to interpret than he had imagined? How else can we explain his response? He concludes swiftly by agreeing that the hindrances of the wind and the evil Genie represent "an internal conflict," and that the dreamer himself might be able to identify "the different figures who appear." He adds that the interpretation of the melon "is certainly not correct" and that "on the question of the portraits Descartes throws no light" (SE, XXI, 204). With these brief remarks Freud's letter (which covers a mere one and one-half pages) ends.

It is perhaps inevitable that Freud will seem to have "failed" to provide a solution for the dreams, and such dissatisfaction actually begins with Leroy himself: "Professor Freud," he writes, "examined these dreams in detail but was unable to explain them."[35] Psychoanalytic readers have certainly come to Freud's defense, but to many of them he has failed as well, since on the one hand he does not pursue the "internal conflict" that he himself points out, and on the other hand Descartes's writings provide much more psychoanalytic evidence than Freud is willing to allow.[36] One critic has speculated that because Freud himself suffered a "parallel conflict" in his own youth, he "felt anxiety over not being able to explain the dream." Another agrees that "one cannot help feeling that some resistance-mechanism was awakened in Freud," and Meltzer even conjectures that Freud's hesitancy may be based on "a rivalry [he] feels . . . with Descartes himself, whose 'Olympica' founded 'modern philosophy' with no questions about originality." "[T]he reading of Descartes's dreams as 'from above,' " she continues, "and as conscious dreams, born of waking moments, is like an unwilled acquiescence . . . to both Descartes's seamless mind and Baillet's reading."[37] One might object here that Freud does not really say that Descartes's dreams are "conscious" at all but that, on the contrary, the dreams "could have been created just as well in a waking

[35] Leroy, *Descartes*, I, 90. In a similar vein see Pierre Mesnard, *Essai sur la morale de Descartes* (Paris, 1936), 11 n. 2; Leon Roth, *Descartes' Discourse on Method* (Oxford, 1937), 43; and Albert Schinz, "Le songe de Descartes et l'Exposition de 1937," *Mercure de France*, 281 (1938), 475 n. 8.

[36] For examples of Freud's defense see Robert Fliess, *The Revival of Interest in the Dream: A Critical Study of Post-Freudian Psychoanalytic Contributions* (New York, 1953), 118-20; Bertram D. Lewin, *Dreams and the Uses of Regression* (New York, 1958), 37-38; Karl Stern, *The Flight from Woman* (New York, 1965), 87; and Jule Eisenbud, "Descartes and Shaw: Some Spatial Aspects of Object Loss," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 5 (1978), 285. On going "further" than Freud see Iago Galdston, "Descartes and Modern Psychiatric Thought," *Isis*, 35 (1944), 120; Feuer, "Dreams of Descartes," 23; Jager, "Three Dreams of Descartes," 195-96; and Allen R. Dyer, "The Dreams of Descartes: Notes on the Origins of Scientific Thinking," *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 14 (1986), 163.

[37] Jacques Barchilon, "Les songes de Descartes du 10 Novembre 1619, et leur interprétation," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 11 (1984), 111; Feuer, "Dreams of Descartes," 24; Meltzer, "Descartes' Dreams," 97, 100 (emphasis removed).

state," and that "the content of the dream is very close to his conscious thoughts."[38] Moreover, it may certainly be helpful to think of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as Freud's own "Olympica"[39]; but I see the relationship between Freud and Descartes somewhat differently insofar as both of them are necessarily addressed—that is, awakened—by the dreams in much the same way, and thus Freud's "participation" does not really represent any more of a "rivalry" than anyone else's.

We have begun to see that this address manifests itself in the desire to appropriate the dreams by making them more "ordinary," less "absurd,"[40] and yet the dreams' absurdity has actually served to guarantee their authenticity. "[T]hey are too idiosyncratic and incoherent not to be genuine," says one reader, and another two even cite their own dreams as "evidence" that Descartes's are not so strange after all.[41] But as Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "dream-thoughts are never absurd . . . and . . . the dream-work produces absurd dreams and dreams containing individual absurd elements if it is faced with the necessity of representing any criticism, ridicule or derision which may be present in the dream-thoughts" (SE, V, 444). In other words, the mere fact that these absurdities are present in Descartes's dreams indicates that they are "already" a particular kind of defense that precedes even Baillet's, and subsequent readings of the dreams—including Freud's—seem inevitably to imitate the dreamer's response when confronted with the necessity for representing his *own* dream-thoughts. Descartes's dreams, that is, appear to be capable of dictating his (own) defense; their very "absurdity" seems to serve as a guarantee, in short, and this whether our definition of the term corresponds to Descartes's or to Freud's, that the dreams had "come from above."

Philosophy, however, seems to feel that it does not require Freud's interference (which is merely another, alien "method"), and on just these grounds readers have long endeavored to explain the dreams from within the perspective of Descartes's method in the *Discourse* and the *Medita-*

[38] Readers submit to a similar error when they argue that Freud claims that only the third dream is a dream "from above"; two examples are Gregor Sebba, *The Dream of Descartes* (Carbondale, 1987), 1; and Francis Pasche, "Métaphysique et inconscient," *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 45 (1981), 10.

[39] See John H. Hanson, "René Descartes and the Dream of Reason," Marie Coleman Nelson (ed.), *The Narcissistic Condition: A Fact of Our Lives and Times* (New York, 1977), 178.

[40] Cf. the "archetypal" aspects of the dreams that one typically finds in Jungian readings; two examples are Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Dream of Descartes," tr. Andrea Dykes and Elizabeth Welsh, *Timeless Documents of the Soul* (Evanston, 1968), 55-147; and John Rittmeister, "Die mystische Krise des jungen Descartes," *Zeitschrift für psychosomatische Medizin und Psychoanalyse*, 15 (1969), 206-24.

[41] Recht, "Foundations," 206. Barchilon, "Songes de Descartes," 112; and Sebba, *Dream of Descartes*, 2-3, cite dreams of their own (a practice initiated of course by Freud himself).

tions—as if, in other words, the dreams had only anticipated it.[42] We have already examined Gouhier's exhortation to read the dreams "like" Descartes himself[43]; but what are the real implications of wanting to imitate Descartes in this way, for does the dreamer himself not attempt, when receiving the dreams, to be "like" "Descartes"—the discoverer of "the foundations of an admirable science"? And is this desire, as Jacques Maritain was perhaps the first to notice, not also the "dream" of Descartes in the sense that it is really his wish?[44] Not only does the dreamer succumb to all the same desires as the "wakeful" critic, but conversely it appears that critics succumb to a similar kind of wish-fulfillment when they read the dreams "like" Descartes by attempting to remember the method that still lies in his future. But what does it really mean to be "Descartes"? For he is already a thoroughly "philosophical" and "wakeful" signature that addresses us from beyond the dreams, and it is this signature, not the "absurdity" of the conflict between the Genie and the Spirit of Truth, that guarantees that we will read the dreams "along the same lines" as the dreamer himself.

Clearly we must better understand what this kind of "imitation" entails. One psychoanalytic reader, Bertram Lewin, has suggested that Descartes himself "imitates" the dreams when he models his very method upon them, for in the dreams Descartes "is exactly what the observer is supposed to be and tries to be in the Cartesian system, that is, *res cogitans*, the pure and irrelevant spectator, the external observer." The dreams, however, are really "unsuccessful" because they fail to "preserve sleep in the face of intrusive bodily pain and discomfort" (the "real pain" he feels as he awakens from the first dream).[45] In short, Lewin writes, "when Descartes came to formulate his scientific picture of the world he made it conform with the state of affairs in an ordinary successful dream," and "the picture of the dream world that succeeds best in sleep . . . came to be the picture of the waking world that succeeded best in explaining it scientifically." Thus it is as if Descartes had only developed his method "after" the dreams (in both senses); and Lewin's aim is to show how the dreams might represent, in the words of one reviewer, "the structural

[42] See Louis Alexandre Foucher de Careil (ed.), *Oeuvres inédites de Descartes* (2 vols.; Paris, 1859-60), I, lxxviii-lxxix; Roger Lefèvre, *La Vocation de Descartes* (2 vols.; Paris, 1956-57), I, 126; Jean Guillaumin, *Le Rêve et le Moi: rupture, continuité, création dans la vie psychique* (Paris, 1979), 100 n. 1; Eugenio Garin, *Vita e opere di Cartesio* (Bari, 1984), 44; and Sebba, *Dream of Descartes*, 7-8. For further criticism of this kind of reading, of which Poulet's essay is certainly the best known example, see Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, " 'L'alto e il basso' e i sogni di Descartes," tr. Mariafranca Spallanzani, *Rivista di filosofia*, 80 (1989), 200-202.

[43] Further examples can be found in Ben-Ami Scharfstein, "Descartes' Dreams," *Philosophical Forum*, 1 (1969), 313; and in Kennington, "Descartes' 'Olympica,' " 174.

[44] Maritain, *Dream of Descartes*, 29.

[45] Cf. Fliess, *Revival*, 118, who defines a "dream from above" in exactly the same terms.

prototypes for Cartesian first philosophy," and how Descartes's method itself might have "proposed a set of perceptual imperatives and an anatomy of the natural world based upon the dreamlike economy of his own defenses."[46] Psychoanalysis has of course long characterized "Cartesianism" as a similar kind of withdrawal or detachment from the world;[47] but one can accuse Lewin's reading of attempting the very same kind of exclusion insofar as, according to the same reviewer, his "interpretation . . . result[s] in the exile of the body in order to create an essentially extracorporeal interpretation of psychic phenomena."[48] Furthermore, what is "an ordinary successful dream"? Would it in fact be interminable?

Jean-Luc Marion provides a second example of "imitative" reading, this time from the point of view of philosophy. He begins with a typical objection that psychoanalysis has failed to give the dreams their "properly philosophical dignity," which can be achieved only by understanding the dreams' "inscription . . . in a philosophical corpus . . . which they more or less inaugurate, but a corpus which, in any case, aims only at the elimination of dreams."[49] Marion's version of the biography is familiar to us insofar as the development of the method actually becomes dependent on the fact that dreams could be eliminated because they were overcome when Descartes "woke up,"[50] but Marion's reading is also remarkably similar to Lewin's in that both of them are equally "extracorporeal." Both readers attempt to separate Descartes's body from the "body" of his philosophical writings, but they do so only in order to rejoin them as "imitations" of each other. Although both Lewin and Marion find a parallel between the dreams and the method by suggesting that the *cogito* is really a replication of ("ordinary") dreams, in Marion's view this "imitation" ultimately takes the form of an indifference to wakefulness that is suggested by the fact that Descartes himself apparently does not "need" to wake up in order to begin his interpretation:

> in order to pass from dream to (rational) sense, Descartes does not feel the need to wake up; the rational awakening has nothing to gain or to lose from the physiological awakening to which he maintains no connection. I can dream with eyes open and think with eyes closed; in the business of thinking, sleep changes nothing. . . . Indifferent to sleep, thought also thinks indifferent to wakefulness.

It is of course hardly surprising to claim that the dreams' "philosophical"

[46] Lewin, *Dreams*, 18, 40, 50; Hanson, "René Descartes," 163, 176-77.

[47] See Maryse Choisy, "L'Angoisse cartésienne," *Psyché*, 20-21 (1948), 749-50; J. O. Wisdom, "Three Dreams of Descartes," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 28 (1947), 17; and Dyer, "Dreams of Descartes," 173.

[48] Hanson, "René Descartes," 170.

[49] Jean-Luc Marion, "Les trois songes ou l'éveil du philosophe," Marion (ed.), *La Passion de la raison: hommage à Ferdinand Alquié* (Paris, 1983), 57.

[50] On this point cf. Gérard Simon, "Descartes, le rêve et la philosophie au XVIIe siècle," *Revue des sciences humaines*, 211 (1988), 137, 141.

status rendered them indifferent to distinctions between dreaming and "not dreaming" (the meaning of which is exactly what I am here trying to question), but in Marion's view it is philosophy itself—"the autonomy of thought," "consciousness as an object"—that has "awakened" from Descartes's dreams. Not only are the dreams philosophical in nature but philosophy itself "wakes up" along with Descartes; in short, "thought begins when consciousness becomes indifferent to its affects," and "in the dreams Descartes thinks as such—of a consciousness without affects."[51]

It is crucial that both these readings, which are perhaps the most sophisticated we possess, want to reconcile Descartes and the dreams merely by repeating the "wakeful" claims of the method itself. But can we assume that we *are* awake when we try to accommodate the dreams? Is it not true that just like Descartes we can think about the dreams whether or not we might "really" be asleep? And are our own readings not every bit as "extracorporeal" because they necessarily want to explain the dreams and thus to be an imitation of the *cogito* itself? We know that we awaken—just like Descartes—when we begin to interpret the dreams, but they do not merely encourage us to wake up and "imitate" them. They dictate, rather, just as they had for the dreamer himself, the necessity of our own desire to find for the dream-thoughts a representation that "succeeds," the necessity for attempting "wakefully" to reconcile the dreams with a biography. Yet because any reader will essentially "repeat" the dreams in this way, the position of the "modern" critic is no more privileged or immune than that of the dreamer himself. Meltzer has begun to describe such a pattern of "censorship" and "recantation" in the dreams' reception, but she seems relatively unconcerned with the importance of her own "fear of failure to be original" and with the fact that she too might be guilty of the very same "blindness to a text" that she attributes to Freud.[52] For "censorship" is nothing other than the address of the dreams themselves, and therefore we cannot exclude the "recantation" that will necessarily be involved in our own awakening as well.

But what does "awakening" really mean? Although Marion subtitles his essay "the awakening of the philosopher," he does not seem to realize that it is just insofar as Descartes does awaken; and just insofar as the dreams will in fact be recalled (both by Descartes and by us), that the status of wakefulness can no longer remain either excluded or ignored. For the fact that we awaken does not mean that we rise above the dreams or separate ourselves from them—not only because there is no such "distance" between a dream and wakefulness but also because awakening has

[51] Marion, "Trois songes," 73-75, 78. For a different critique of Marion see Fernand Hallyn, "*Olympica*: les songes du jeune Descartes," Françoise Charpentier (ed.), *Le songe à la Renaissance* (Saint-Étienne, 1990), 48-50.

[52] Meltzer, "Descartes' Dreams," 91, 98, 100.

nothing to do with that kind of "waking up." The effect of awakening is not that one merely "returns" to wakefulness or that one begins retrospectively to understand what it means to have been "asleep" (the claims of analytic philosophy notwithstanding), for awakening only allows us to remember the reality that is now "forgotten," and it is for this reason that we can no longer be so sure either of what it means to be "awake" or how to separate what is "real" from what only appears so with respect to a dream. A dream does not merely represent the fulfillment of a wish, does not merely function as a means to prolong sleep in the face of some "real pain." As Jacques Lacan remarks in his analysis of the "dream of the burning child" in Freud, a dream is also a missed encounter and a fundamental nonconfrontation.

In Freud the dream concerns the corpse of a boy that has caught fire in the middle of the night when an old man, whose job it had been to watch over the candles that had been placed near the body, falls asleep, and the boy's father, asleep in the next room, dreams that his son calls out to him in order to wake him up: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" According to Freud the function of this dream is to prolong sleep—so that the father can continue to rest, so that the son may remain "alive" for just a moment longer before his father must wake up to put out the fire—but Lacan also directs our attention to the fact that the old man continues sleeping despite the fact that the father wakes up, a detail which is itself a figure for the essential nonconfrontation between dreaming and awakening, between the real that is glimpsed in dreams and the reality that we encounter only once we wake up:

> What is it that wakes the sleeper? Is it not, *in* the dream, another reality?. . . Is not the dream essentially, one might say, an act of homage to the missed reality—the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, in some never attained awakening?[53]

Let us therefore ask what reality—which is precisely not "the dream really dreamt"—might "escape" when Descartes's dreams awaken us. Even though the dreams demand their own accommodation, do we not essentially miss something, just like Descartes, when we try to synthesize them—even though they call out to us like a burning child in the next room, or even though they are offered to us like a melon from a foreign land?

We necessarily feel a certain "pain" when the dreams elude us as well; and although we too may want to jerk ourselves into the "wakeful" safety of a philosophical history, a biography, or even a parody, we can accomplish this only by alternately opening and closing our eyes to the

[53] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978), 58 (emphasis removed). For Freud's presentation see SE V, 509-11, 533-34, 570-71.

sparks all around us in order to find a solution based on "reasons taken from Philosophy." Philosophy, like wakefulness itself, is thus not the state we are "in" so much as something to which we must appeal. And when, as Descartes himself does in the third dream, we try to (re)interpret all of the dreams even before we are fully "awake," what we end up repeating is nothing more nor less than his awakening itself, and that awakening is our solution.

Yet this wakefulness is only a dream's "imitation," for it merely points toward a reality that we have in fact already missed. In other words the dreams address that part of us that *remains* asleep—that does not really encounter the dreams' reality but merely tries to "remember" it. Like Descartes we both wake up and never do. We might well manage to make the dreams disappear into a synthesis, but like awakening itself— which is also a synthesis—the text that we produce only conceals. A dream is a child burning, Lacan writes, "a firebrand [that] of itself . . . brings fire where it falls—and one cannot see what is burning, for the flames blind us."[54] The address of Descartes's dreams ensures that we will repeat the dreamer's own attempt to accommodate the "foundations" that, once he is awake, have already escaped—but only because they have apparently been "forgotten." Even though the dreams may ineluctably call out to us as we read, the fact that they always pass *us* by as well may indicate that we too are doomed (like Freud) to "fail"; and yet it is exactly because the dreams will awaken us as well as the dreamer that our criticism—which remains "asleep," which has only an illusion of wakefulness—will also be fated to continue. . . .

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[54] Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 59.